

Deloitte/Management magazine Executive of the Year

Kim Ellis

CONSISTENT TRACK RECORD

An email may not be the standard measure of a man. But with Kim Ellis it says a lot. The master of the 10 bullet-point email can quickly cut to the core of complex issues: those simple emails later growing into large and significant projects.

And there have been a large number of these projects in recent years. Forced to rethink its future when offshore support from Waste Management Inc USA was withdrawn back in 2000, the New Zealand company had to make some big decisions.

It decided to expand into the Australian market (also see article on page 78 of this issue) and a series of milestone investments were rolled out. Managing director Kim Ellis, who has been at the company's helm since 1993, comments somewhat wryly that it was "an ambitious plan at the time".

Ellis now presides over a business with operations that straddle both sides of the Tasman. Waste Management's future stability and growth are safely spread across the two countries.

This year's judges praised Ellis for the "hugely consistent track record of achievement" that he pumps out year after year. They also cited his management of what must have been a difficult transition and noted his "good execution in an industry that is tough to make sexy and exciting".

Chairman Jim Syme, who has worked with Ellis since 1997, describes Ellis as a "highly intelligent and very strategic thinker" who guides the company in everybody's best interests. "Kim leads by example and is committed, hardworking and passionate about the business." Their working relationship, he says, is professional and laced with respect.

This commitment plays out at meetings for the company's executives which, irrespective of whether they're held in the South Island or Australia, Ellis often goes to great lengths to attend. It also manifests itself in Ellis' preference for attending reviews of the organisation's key executives – occasions which he sees as opportunities for enhancing passion and pride in the company.



Ellis' management style, says Syme, is very straightforward, characterised by efficiency and good time management. His insistence on clear and complete communication means there can be no misunderstandings on issues. And that means decisions are invariably made.

Ellis himself describes his time at Waste Management as an exciting ride: the job entailing "an intriguing mix" of detailed management and long-range strategy. The company is, he says, by far the largest in a business sector that touches everyone and is subject to the glare of often-negative publicity.

Close media scrutiny would not be new to Ellis. When he took over as general manager (Southern Health District) for the Bay of Plenty Area Health Board – the role he held immediately prior to joining Waste Management – he had fronted up to an organisation in crisis. Still struggling with the fallout from its separation from the Waikato Hospital Board in 1990 it faced repeated media calls for an enquiry.

Over the next two years Ellis focused on reducing costs, upgrad-

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ing the organisation's financial management, rebuilding commitment from key staff and leading the organisation's transition into an independent Crown Health Enterprise as Lakeland Health.

So his tasks at Waste Management must have seemed altogether different when he arrived in 1993. Grant Tietjens, Waste Management's former chief financial officer who worked alongside Ellis for 11 years, says Ellis inherited a very experienced management team. "He used to say to me that his challenge was to keep them. And it's testimony to Ellis' skills as a leader that even today he still has many very senior team members."

Tietjens also recalls how Ellis maintained the company's ability to wipe aside potential office politics, bolstering a culture that allows

people to speak openly and honestly without hidden agendas.

Ellis also brought some balance to the top team's "work-hard culture", establishing, for example, opportunities for team members' wives to join together with the senior management team several times a year and evolving the culture into that of a "close-knit family".

Ellis' knack of quickly grasping the key points of complex issues is coupled with an ability to give his direct reports the space to manage their own roles. He keeps in touch with major and tricky issues without micro-managing every tiny detail.

These combined talents and his sustained track record of success, say this year's judges, make him a worthy winner of this year's Deloitte/*Management* magazine Executive of the Year Award. **M**

JUDGES' COMMENTS

WINNER KIM ELLIS

MANAGING DIRECTOR, WASTE MANAGEMENT

Kim Ellis has been top of the management heap at Waste Management since 1993. In that time he has hardly put a foot wrong. "This man has an incredible track record," said the judges. "His record of consistent growth, strong profit performance, strategic implementation and delivery of best management practice across the board mark him out as an exceptional leader. Gathering garbage is not the most exciting business in town but it is one of the most critical and Ellis and his team do it better than most. He is a thoughtful leader who puts great store by doing it right, looking after his people and thinking about the impact of his enterprise's actions on the environment and the community.



FINALISTS MICHAEL DANIELL

MANAGING DIRECTOR & CEO,
FISHER & PAYKEL HEALTHCARE

Michael Daniell's team at Fisher & Paykel Healthcare turned in another record year of revenue growth and operating profit. And Daniell's focus on his people to deliver innova-

tive new products, manufactured to demanding international health

sector standards, and to expand markets around the world pays off. The company once again featured in the top five of New Zealand's "best places to work" survey in the large employer category. F&P Healthcare has continued to flourish under Daniell's leadership since it was split off from the almost equally successful F&P Appliances business. Worldwide the company now employs 1100 people and enters new markets with new products every year.



DOUG HEFFERNAN CHIEF EXECUTIVE, MIGHTY RIVER POWER

Doug Heffernan has been switched on to the New Zealand energy industry much of his working life. He has been chief executive of Mighty River since 1998 and was CEO of Power New Zealand before that. He is, said

the judges, one of New Zealand's most experienced, committed and competent energy industry executives. Heffernan is a great people leader who through clever application of technology and management has been outstandingly successful in extracting value from the rivers and other natural resources his company uses. He has forged strong commercial partnerships with iwi of the Central North Island in both hydro and geothermal power projects, strengthened the company's marketing, built retail volumes, and adopted best practice processes across the board. This year he turned in the company's "best ever operating result".

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